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Training programs for paraprofessional school personnel, growing out of the employment needs of the economically disadvantaged and the personnel needs of schools, are not useful in providing for the presumed goals of the paraprofessional--to become a teacher. To attain accreditation in most states, paraprofessionals must participate in a college program of teacher education. Most colleges, geared to the needs of the middle-class white student, have not served the disadvantaged because of the defeatist attitudes towards these students held in colleges, high admission standards, and the inherent subjectivity and lack of accuracy in present teacher potential evaluation criteria. (In many colleges this is the result of a confusion between academic and professional standards.) However, the success of programs such as The City University of New York's Paraprofessional Teacher Education program (which integrates a teacher education curriculum with paraprofessional work) shows that demands for a college education for the economically disadvantaged are slowly being met. (A four-item bibliography is included.) (SM)

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The Paraprofessional As Student

by ERIC J. WARD

Growing public concern about the mature ghetto resident reflects a new awareness of need to develop meaningful employment opportunities for a large segment of the population, already economically and socially handicapped in our social structure, and becoming even more so in our increasingly technological economy. Moreover, as public service management continues to seek desperately for a major source of paraprofessional laborers to fill the increasing social and educational needs of our modern society, it seems natural that it should appeal to residents of communities who have had to rely heavily upon a wide variety of public service programs for their own sustenance.

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Programs for the development of paraprofessionals in such areas as education and social welfare seek to find a concrete antidote to the pathology of the ghetto—positive change through the availability of education, employment, and social status. Training and career ladders are being constructed for paraprofessionals to guide them to the professional stage. Clearly defined sub-goals or plateaus are being laid out along the way to permit a paraprofessional to pause permanently or temporarily but with recognized credentials indicating the possession of some professional skills.

Considerable sums of money are becoming available to recruit, train and employ thousands of mature adults from disadvantaged areas to serve as paraprofessionals in urban school systems. Local systems are seeking to define the classroom responsibilities of the paraprofessionals, distinguishing them from those of the teacher. But the higher education component, a basic element in the upgrading of "sub" professionals to fully accredited status, remains a subject for faculty conferences. Obviously the presumed professional goal of the paraprofessional is to become a classroom teacher.

works in a public school thirty hours a week,

Given the accrediting system operating throughout most states, the paraprofessionals, often referred to as auxiliaries, teacher aides, or educational assistants, must participate in a college program of teacher education.

During the spring semester of 1968, approximately 858 paraprofessionals serving in the kindergartens of the New York City public schools reported for registration at five of The City University's community colleges, Bronx, Kingsborough, Manhattan, New York City, and Queensborough. Under a grant from the Human Resources Administration, The City University, through the Division of Teacher Education, offered six credits tuition-free to this group of paraprofessionals who worked a full day, five days a week, and reported to campus a minimum of two evenings each week for classes. Their characteristics were typical of paraprofessionals across the country with the exception that all had completed high school.

and attends classes three or four evenings a week.

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A survey conducted at one of the colleges describes the "typical" paraprofessional as "a mother, who maintains a household, works in a public school thirty hours a week, and attends classes three or four evenings a week. She is about thirty-five years old and has not attended classes in at least fifteen to sixteen years." There tends to be five members in the paraprofessional's household and more than half have annual family incomes of less than $6,500 before taxes. A survey of students at all five community colleges indicated that they regard their "biggest problem in learning" as finding a good time or place to study at home.

It can be expected that this kind of student will be seen more and more frequently on campuses across the country. In 1966 the University of Maine conducted a project to train auxiliary candidates as part of an NDEA Institute for Advanced Study for Teachers of Disadvantaged Children. Criteria for selection of the auxiliary candidates, who ranged in age from 20 to 50, included having the youngest child in school and a family income in the poverty range.

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As paraprofessionals knock on college doors seeking admission, they bring a briefcase loaded with all the issues related to "high risk" students entering institutions of higher learning plus an additional portfolio of "problems" that will be laid at the doorsills of faculties traditionally oriented toward a whippersnappering student body described by Egerton as "an elite minority . . . products of the middle and upper classes of society—affluent rather than poor, white rather than black, well schooled, tested, and selected." [1]

Even faculties of municipal and state colleges who have thought of themselves as serving the less fortunate now recall that their student bodies have traditionally been at best a whiter shade of pale. To suppose that a reapportionment of the student body will not bring about a change in campus operations is to be sociologically naive, and even the schools that have introduced numerically miniscule programs for the disadvantaged have observed a noticeable effect on campus. "Now, racial and ethnic minorities—and the poor generally—present the American college with a . . . challenge. The customary standards of admission—money, prior preparation, test scores—have effectively excluded most of them from a chance at college, and even the ones who have made it in have often succumbed to the prevailing climate faced there." [2]

To suggest that few of our American colleges are ready for or responsive to these students is to point to the obvious. As Feibleman talks about what happens to students in college it is clear that our higher educational system is geared for the student who has yet to engage in the "brutal struggle for survival where the competition is so fierce that not much stands in the way of the ruthless and ambitious." [3] The paraprofessional coming out of the ghetto is intimately involved with the cold facts of life and her very existence as she makes her belated way to the Halls of Ivy serves as testament to her "unconquerable soul". A classroom filled with paraprofessionals may be highly uncomfortable for the sophisticated instructor who as an intellectual fits Feibleman's description as "simply one who is at home among the classic abstractions."

The paraprofessional who would be a teacher must be prepared to participate in at least two screening exercises. The first is the natural hurdle of going through a college program, including one in teacher education. Academic standards dominate in this area, but they are often confused with the requirements of the second hurdle—professional standards other than intellectual achievement as applied to prospective teachers. The overlapping of the two areas generally permits easy disqualification or overrating (whichever choice appeals to the evaluator) of a student who is moving toward the classroom as a teacher.

It would be comforting but false to believe that the currently applied systems for the selection of prospective teachers are sufficiently developed to select with even reasonably close accuracy the "good" teacher, particularly for the urban schools. The course instructor now called upon to evaluate a student as a potential teacher

has to find a standard other than the kindly old white-haired lady he remembers fondly from the third grade. Hopefully it was not a futile search for a substitute standard that caused many instructors of paraprofessionals in The City University program, when canvassed on their estimate of a student's potential as a teacher, to refuse to answer on the grounds that they had no way of knowing. If the paraprofessional is to be given some skills as a potential teacher in a teacher preparation program, some evaluation of the potential teacher is necessary to gauge the effectiveness of the program to prepare teachers.

The reaction to college programs for the training of paraprofessionals has met with the usual response to programs for the disadvantaged by some faculty, "a nice thing for the colleges to attempt but can they do it?" In a survey of 215 campuses throughout the country which operate programs for the disadvantaged, the Southern Regional Education Board noted that, "On campuses where debate about higher education for high risks has begun, it often centers not on how to do it, but on whether it should be done at all. Many educators contend that the cumulative effects of race and class discrimination are irredeemable by the time a youngster reaches college age, and others say that even if colleges could help they should not be expected to make up for the deficiencies of prior education." [4]

This position when coupled with the delicately posed, "wouldn't it be better not to raise the aspirations of persons who by position in life are doomed to failure in the university, rather than dangle an unattainable goal above their heads," serves as a pervasive undercurrent which injects a decisive element of defeat into any program.

Farmer's description of the scene that occurred when World War II veterans descended upon the campus reflects some of the anticipated effects of paraprofessionals in college. "At that time institutions of higher learning were reluctant to accept them as the educators felt the returning veterans would downgrade higher education because they had been away from school for a period of time and they lacked the ability to achieve academic success. Actually the reverse took place. Not only was the veteran's scholarship of high quality, but he refused to put up with the inadequacies of the educational establishments. No longer were the regurgitated lectures, inadequate curriculum and archaic administration practices tolerated by these adults. The result of this assault on the ivory towers led to needed reforms within." [5]

There are many signs, however, that college faculty are ready to teach the new breed of student. Of 1,069 grades recorded last spring for paraprofessionals in The City University's program only 19 students received academic failures. Two reasons account for the low rate. The first is that many students are able to perform at acceptable college levels. The second factor is the concern of participating faculty members who are sensitive to the responsibility of faculty to educate all students presented to them. This faculty is not wrestling with the question, "Can the colleges respond?" Instead they have chosen to demonstrate the colleges' ability to respond effectively.

The positive effects of the Paraprofessional Teacher Education Program in the Spring of 1968 has prompted the Division of Teacher Education of The City University to develop two proposals. The first, submitted to the U.S. Office of Education under the Education Professions Development Act of 1968, would expand the program for educating paraprofessionals to a 66-credit, Associate in Arts Degree within a three year period. Students would work the equivalent of a four day week and, on released time from work equal to one full day, attend classes on campus approximately six hours a week. In addition to receiving credit for job experience, a weekly seminar would be held at the job site.

A second proposal submitted to the Human Resources Administration and recently approved, continues the Spring program into the current semester. Approximately 800 educational assistants have registered for six credits in liberal arts in The City University's community colleges.

The 800 students represent little more than a shadow of the large number of paraprofessionals throughout New York City who are clamoring to participate in a career ladder program. A conservative estimate puts the number at 9,000.

Many programs are being advanced to provide higher education for the children of the disadvantaged. Now the adult disadvantaged, those who have gone through a system that did not provide initial opportunities or "catch up" opportunities, are demanding a first chance. Colleges and universities throughout the country are going to be asked with increased vigor to develop programs for the mature ghetto resident who stalks the heretofore illusive and elusive ivy tower.

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1 Egerton, John. "High Risks: Five Looks", *Southern Education Report*, April 1968, p. 25.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

3 Feibleman, James K., "What Happens in College", *Saturday Review*, October, 1962.

4 Egerton, John. "High Risk", *Southern Education Report*, March 1968, p. 5.

5 Farmer, Martha. "Counseling Adult Students", Proceedings of a Pre-Convention Workshop, Counseling the Adult Student, Report of Commission XIII, American College Personnel Association, April 1967.